



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever (RMSF)

What is RMSF?

Rocky Mountain spotted fever is the name given to a disease caused by the bacteria, *Rickettsia rickettsii*, that can infect both animals and people. Named because it was first recognized as occurring in the Rocky Mountain area, the disease actually occurs more frequently in the eastern part of the country especially the Southeastern states. Cases occur each summer in Indiana.

How is RMSF spread?

RMSF is spread in Indiana by the bite of the dog tick, *Demacentor variabilis*. Ticks acquire their infection from small wild living rodents. The tick injects the bacteria into either the animal or human host as it is feeding on blood.

Who is at risk for RMSF?

Anyone who engages in outdoor activities where there are ticks.

How do I know if I have RMSF?

You cannot tell without seeing your doctor. Your physician will complete a thorough history, review of your signs and symptoms, give you a physical examination, and conduct laboratory testing to confirm whether or not you have RMSF.

Patients with RMSF first show symptoms 5-10 days after a tick bite. Early symptoms are not specific for RMSF but may include:

- Fever,
- Severe headache,
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Lack of appetite
- Muscle pain
- Joint pain
- Rash

How can RMSF be treated?

RMSF can be treated with appropriate antibiotics, usually tetracycline or doxycycline, but others may be used depending on the patient's age or other health status. Your physician will prescribe antibiotics that are appropriate for you.

How is RMSF prevented?

Preventing the attachment and feeding of ticks through personal protection measures can prevent RMSF.

- Wear light-colored long pants with cuffs tucked into socks and long sleeves when walking in grassy or wooded areas. It is easier to spot ticks on light-colored clothing.
- Put insect repellent containing DEET on clothing, socks, and shoes and exposed skin. Permethrin (Permanone) will keep ticks off clothes and shoes but should not be applied directly to skin.
- Check every 2 hours for ticks on clothes or exposed skin.
- After returning from the grassy or wooded area, brush off clothing and body. Inspect clothes and body for ticks, particularly in the areas of the groin, back of neck and knees, and armpits. Take a hot shower and wash clothing at a high temperature.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

http://www.cdc.gov/ticks/diseases/rocky_mountain_spotted_fever/faq.html

This page was last reviewed September 28, 2011.

